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## THE SIGN OF JONAH

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What did Jesus mean by "the sign of Jonah"? Did the point of comparison lie in the fact that as Jonah was a preacher of righteousness to the men of Nineveh, arousing in them, by his stern and authoritative message of impending judgment, a genuine change of heart, so the Son of man, "more than Jonah," who required of his contemporaries a far more searching analysis of their lives, should in the same way prove himself a "sign" to them? Or did it consist in the miraculous deliverance, in the one case from "the belly of the sea-monster," and the other from "the heart of the earth"?

Now if we possessed only the Third Gospel, I imagine the answer would be clear and unambiguous, namely, that they were both, in however different a degree, accredited preachers sent from God, and as the one was recognized as such by the men of Nineveh, so should the other be by the men of his generation. Eliminating for the moment the First Gospel, let us see what St. Luke means us to understand by Christ's words. He tells us (11:29, 30) that "as the multitudes were gathering together unto him, he began to say, 'This generation is an evil generation; it seeketh after a sign; and there shall no sign be given to it but the sign of Jonah. For even as Jonah became a sign unto the Ninevites, so shall also the Son of man be to this generation.'" It is to be noticed that Jonah is here described as having become "a sign to *the Ninevites*." We obviously turn at once to the Old Testament book to ascertain in what way he became a sign to them. We there find that Jonah was commanded by Yahweh to go to the extreme East and cry against the wickedness of Nineveh; but unwilling to preach to an alien people, he endeavors to escape "from the presence of Yahweh" by embarking in a ship bound for the far West. Punished for his obstinacy and disobedience, he is swallowed alive by a sea-monster, in whose belly he is brought to repentance, and upon prayer to God is cast up safely upon the Mediterranean shore. A second time the command is given him, and on this occa-

sion he obeys. "And Jonah began to enter into the city a day's journey, and he cried, and said, 'Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown.' And the people of Nineveh believed God; and they proclaimed a fast," etc. (3:3, 4), with the result that the catastrophe was averted. Now I think it is obvious that a reader, starting from St. Luke and going back only to the book of Jonah, would inevitably decide that the point of comparison in Christ's words lay in the fact that both he and the Old Testament messenger were sent from God; and that as in the one case the message itself was proof of its divine origin and so of the authority of its bearer, so ought the words and work of Christ to constitute a sufficient commendation of his own claims. It would be plain that the engulfment by the "whale" was in no way connected with the fact of Jonah having become a sign to the Ninevites: for not only was that purely a personal matter between himself and his Maker, brought about by his disobedience and terminated upon his repentance, but Jonah had been commanded to go and preach the identical message to them *before his catastrophe*, before he had even perversely boarded the ship of Tarshish. Had he gone at once, there would have been no miraculous swallowing and casting up alive, *yet he would still have been a sign to them*, for the sign lay in his authoritative commission from God, which at his very first preaching they recognized. And it is further to be remembered that there is not the slightest hint in the book that when Jonah did enter Nineveh and began to proclaim his message, either that he announced to them the fact of his having been swallowed and cast up as a sign, or that the Ninevites themselves regarded it as a sign, or that they knew anything whatever about it, yet Jonah in St. Luke is pictured as having become "a sign to *the Ninevites*." Inasmuch as the story of Jonah itself reveals that the only "sign" to the men of Nineveh consisted in the authority with which he spoke, as of one sent from God, and which the people, convicted by their own consciences as worthy of punishment, most truly accepted, believing the threats which he uttered in God's name, an inquirer must inevitably reach the conclusion that Jesus means that his own work and teaching constituted a sufficient "sign" to the Jews of his day, and as such, were the antitype of the work of Jonah. In the one case as in the other, it is obvious that only those who had "ears to hear" could appreciate the sign.

If St. Mark records him as saying that "no sign shall be given to this generation," it in no way excludes the exception as given by St. Luke. Christ's ministry itself was a sufficient sign of his authority and origin. No heavenly portent was necessary.

Turning now to the context in St. Luke, we see the conclusion at which we have arrived from an examination of the book of Jonah very clearly borne out. Two sayings follow, the purpose of each of which is to illustrate and explain the brief statement of Jesus in vs. 30. The queen of the South shall condemn this generation in the last day; for she, a stranger, recognizing as from God the wisdom which flowed from the lips of Solomon, gave heed to his words; yet the chosen people, with their centuries of training, are rejecting the utterances of one who by his every deed and word, is proving himself to be "more than Solomon." Again, "The men of Nineveh shall stand up in the judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it: for they repented at the preaching of Jonah; and behold, more than Jonah is here." It is difficult to see how St. Luke's words could be clearer. If, in using the Logia, he has transposed vss. 31 and 32, he has probably done so for the sake of chronological sequence. The lesson of both is absolutely the same. The queen of the South required no sign from heaven in order to accept the teaching of Solomon: his words themselves were proof of their source. The men of Nineveh asked no miracle of Jonah: his own burning message constituted him a sign to them. And it ought to be remembered that even if they had demanded of him a sign (of which there is not the slightest hint in the book of Jonah), and in return he had recounted his miraculous experience, they would have had no more than his own unsupported word upon which to rely, for Nineveh is some distance from the Mediterranean. Had they doubted his authority in the first instance, would their belief in him have been confirmed by his narration of a portent which none of them had witnessed? When the Jews doubted our Lord's authority, they did not ask to *hear* from him the account of some past miracle by which his work had been made clear to himself. They asked him to show *them* a sign from heaven. And this perverseness is just what the lesson of the Ninevites and the queen of the South is intended to correct.

But, it may be asked, Why does Christ use the future tense with

reference to his sign? He had already been preaching for a long time: do not *δοθήσεται* and *ἔσται* imply some sign which was yet to be given? But if the sign included our Lord's whole life and teaching, as I believe it unquestionably does, I cannot see how his answer could have been differently phrased. The people obviously were seeking some heavenly portent which by testifying unmistakably and absolutely to his unique claims would relieve them of the moral responsibility of weighing and testing his message. This has been a common enough phenomenon at all times, and is incident to human nature. But to Jesus such a demand is characteristic of "an evil generation," and he will have none of it. "No sign shall be given it, save the sign of Jonah." Could the statement possibly have been thrown into the present tense? Hardly; for it included *all* that the Son of man was yet to say and do, much of which still lay in the future, but all of which, past, and present, and future, was to constitute to the men of that generation, if they had eyes to see and ears to hear, the sign that Jesus Christ had come forth from God with an authoritative message for them. What I wish to emphasize is, that a candid study of the Third Gospel, compared with the book of Jonah, forces upon us the conviction that St. Luke does not mean us to understand by "the sign of Jonah" that Christ is here comparing his future resurrection with Jonah's miraculous deliverance from the sea-monster, but is teaching that as an alien race accepted, on its own intrinsic merits, a Jewish preacher's message, *a fortiori* the Jewish people should receive one of their own race, who spake, as the Fourth Evangelist by almost universal consent truly recorded, as never man spake.

But when we turn to the First Gospel, we find an entirely different meaning given to "the sign of Jonah": "for as Jonah was in the belly of the sea-monster three days and three nights; so shall the Son of man be in the heart of the earth three days and three nights" (12:40). Is this the evangelist's own expansion of St. Luke's words? Or did St. Luke intend to give a summary of them? Let us suppose for a moment that St. Luke has condensed the saying, either from the First Gospel or the Logia. Now if we eliminate for an instant Matt. 12:40, we cannot fail to see that as between Matt. 12:39, 41, 42 and Luke 11:29b-32 there is a literary dependence, either of one upon the other,

or of both upon a common source, for they are in almost absolute verbal argument. We have already seen that the Third Evangelist makes the point of comparison to consist in the authoritative preaching of repentance on the part of Jonah and our Lord; and if Matt. 12:39, 41, 42 be read consecutively, it will be seen that exactly the same teaching is enforced. Vs. 40, however, explains the sign in a totally different way either from vs. 41 or Luke 11:30, 32. If then, St. Luke has abridged Matthew, he has not only absolutely failed to give the meaning of the latter, but has definitely led his readers to believe that "the sign" consisted, not, as the First Gospel affirms in vs. 40, in the resurrection, but in the preaching of repentance! But what possible object could St. Luke have in making such an alteration, whether it be from the First Gospel or the Logia? It is difficult to discover one. Twice at least in this Gospel Christ foretells his resurrection; had he done so here, it is incredible that the Evangelist would so completely have altered his meaning. And as the context in the First Evangelist is in entire accord with the whole passage as given by St. Luke, while vs. 40 is at once incompatible with the saying in the latter and out of harmony with its own context, I think that, even did we not know of more than one analogous case elsewhere, we may dismiss the hypothesis that the Logion in St. Luke is designed as an abridgment. What then, are we to say of St. Matthew's "expansion"? If the unknown Jewish-Christian editor of St. Matthew, whose personality even today remains an insoluble enigma, was like St. Luke in not being an eye-witness of what he wrote, we must also add, "with a difference." Those who have read Mr. Allen's *St. Matthew*, together with his luminous essay in the back of the volume, will appreciate with what singular freedom the First Evangelist has edited his sources. To examine the general characteristics of his Gospel would be to carry me far afield—they are lucidly enough set forth in Mr. Allen's volume of the *International Critical Commentary*. But I think most students would agree that, especially as regards St. Mark and the Logia, he has at times expanded, interpreted, or excised, to a degree by no means equaled on the part of St. Luke. It may be sufficient to recall 5:32 and 19:9, where as against not only St. Mark, but St. Luke and St. Paul also, he has introduced an exception, so as to bring our Lord's teach-

ing into accord with the stricter school of Jewish interpretation of Deut. 24:1-4. This conservative attitude toward the Law is characteristic. Another noteworthy phenomenon is his rather frequent use of Old Testament passages as prophetic or typical of some incident in Christ's life, inserted to demonstrate to his Jewish-Christian readers that even in details "the New lies hidden in the Old." Of such a character, I think we may safely say, is the addition of 12:40. The Logia referred to "the sign of Jonah." But in what way was he a sign? Looking back over our Lord's life, and recalling the crisis in the life of Jonah, the editor conceived that the point of comparison did not lie in the preaching of repentance, but in the fact that both Christ and Jonah had been buried for three days. That he also regarded the latter to be the meaning of Christ's original words I believe to be undoubted. Accordingly he alters the Logion, "For even as Jonah became a sign unto the Ninevites, so shall also the Son of man be to this generation": and incorporating *verbatim* the LXX of Jonah 2:1, he brings type and antitype into relation by writing, "For as 'Jonah was in the belly of the sea-monster three days and three nights' (LXX), so shall the Son of man be in the heart of the earth three days and three nights." Although the analogy is somewhat forced—the one whole day and parts of two others being expanded into "three days and *three nights*"—in view of the striking parallel, serving as a direct Old Testament passage foreshadowing the burial and resurrection of our Lord, and in view also of the already current *μετὰ τρεῖς ἡμέρας*, it was extremely natural. It is noticeable that, in its altered form, Jonah is no longer a sign "to the Ninevites." The editor has satisfied himself, as I have said, that the miracle in the Mediterranean was "the sign," which was intended, not for the men of Nineveh, but for after generations, who were to see in it a type of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Accordingly he thus interprets it. To the Jewish-Christians for whom the Gospel was written, it was intended to serve and, as history very clearly shows, did serve, along with the oft-repeated *ἵνα πληρωθῇ* and similar phrases, as a confirmation of faith in him who, as the same evangelist has recorded, came not "to destroy the law or the prophets," but "to fulfil."